

BALLADS OF KERALA

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A distinct feature of the oral tradition of a country's folklore is the ballad—stirring or nostalgic, devotional or martial. The wandering minstrel can rouse his village audience with remembered glory, the teller in the fields draws strength from a ballad hummed to the rhythm of the plough. As a matter of fact ballads and folksongs run parallel to each other and together they project, with a fair degree of accuracy, the gross currents of thinking of people. The people are fond of ballads, of legends of religious sanctity, since, it goes without saying that, religiousity is a particular feature of that section of the people. If the people take particular pride in their heroes, mythical or historical, they must be courageous, bold and proud of their heritage. Ancient folk literature of Kerala had an immense body of ballads, as story-telling is, after all, the oldest preoccupation of literature. The way traditional, or folk, or popular ballads tell a story, has long been admired. Sometimes a ballad deals with a single story or a descriptive life-story, taken from epic, mythology, history, social life etc and revealed dramatically. Some specimens of the earliest ballads of Kerala are to be found in *Silappadikaram*. But they represent the ancient Tamil tradition. The earliest ballads of Kerala which are designated as Malayalam proper, can be traced only in the ballads of North Malabar. Their counterpart in the Cochin area have not survived. But another group of ballads known as *Thekken Pattukal* have survived in Travancore. The southern songs exhibit the influence of Tamil to a large extent. Therefore the ballads of North Malabar are said to belong to special category.

Folk ballads in Malayalam have not received attention from modern scholars. Ballads are treated as a branch of folk songs in Malayalam. The large collections of ballads were grouped under two heads such as *Vadakken Pattukal* (Ballads of North Malabar) and *Thekken Pattukal* (Ballads of Travancore). Among them *Vadakken Pattukal* is popular and famous. This broad division was based on a geographical classification of areas of origin. N. Vanamamalai¹ has classified ballads into four types; epic fragments or mythical ballads, historical ballads, romantic ballads and ballads with

social themes. A broad classification of ballads mainly of historical, religious and social themes follows.

Ballads of North Malabar

Percey Macqueen was the first scholar to explore the field of Malayalam ballads. He has collected the bulk of heroic songs prevalent in the northern parts of Kerala mainly in the Malabar area. Next to Percey Macqueen, Dr. Chelmat Achutha Menon, Kanjirakulam Kochukrishna Nadar, Vettiyar Premnath, M.D. Raghavan, Dr. S.K. Nair, Konniyur T. Kassim, T.H. Kunhiraman Nambiar have made further studies in this direction. Kanjirakulam Kochukrishna Nadar has enriched the ballad literature in Malayalam by his notable publications dealing with historical ballads of the Travancore area. *Eravikkutti Pillai Poru* (1962), *Chamundi Katha*, *Mathilakathu Katha*, *Thekken Pattukal* (1967) are his contributions to ballad literature. His *Charitra paramaya natoti pattukal* was a text book for students in primary school. It is the first government approved text book containing ballads. Kochukrishna Nadar deserves the appreciation of folklorists in Kerala for his efforts in the field of ballad literature. *Chengannur Kunhathi* (1964) is a ballad compiled by Premnath. Suranattu Kunjan Pillai has edited and published *Ponnirathal Katha* (1954). The same text has been quoted by Aranmula Sathyavathan in his work *Ponnirathal Katha* (1968). A collection of ballads of North Malabar by M.C. Appunni Nambiar is available. C.P. Govindhan Pillai has also collected ballads. Among these ballad scholars Kanjirakulam Kochukrishna Nadar ranks first. He did not receive any kind of patronage from any institution or University. He was the first native scholar who knew the importance of the ballad literature.

It was actually Dr. Chelmat Achutha Menon's publication '*Ballads of North Malabar*' (1936) under the auspices of the University of Madras that blazed the trail. *Mathilerikanni* of T.H. Kunhiraman Nambiar is the latest contribution to the ballad literature of Kerala.

Mathilakathu Katha and *Chamundi Katha* of Kanjirakulam Kochukrishna Nadar come under the religious ballad literature. *Mathilakathu Katha* is based on the legendary story on the Sree Padmanabha Swami Temple. *Chamundi Katha* deals with another version of the Kali episode. C.P. Govinda Pillai has quoted the story of Bheeman and the Mahabharata War in *Bheeman Kathayum Bhasathaporum* in *Pazhaya Pattukal* (pp. 34-62).

The story element is vital in a ballad. If the folksong does not actually tell a story from beginning to end, it can not be called a ballad. *Kerala Bhashagangal* of Chirakkal T. Balakrishnan Nair consists of a number of folk songs which bear the texts of traditional stories. Arrival of Annapurneswari is a traditional song sung for the performance of *Kothamuri* in north Malabar. The song depicts the historical incidents related to Kolathunadu

and the installation of the Bhagavati, the *Annapurneswari*. *Pumalappothi*, a local diety who lived near Valappattanam is the heroine of a song, sung for *Kolkkali*, *Neeliyamma Thottam*, a tribal goddess, has influenced the villagers and the people. They used to worship her for the safe birth of children and the eradication of the diseases of children. The traditional song of Malayalam on the *Kadalayi Krishnan* is another ballad prevalent in the villages of Cannanore. There are a good number of ballads connected to the powerful diety, called Annapurneswari of Cherukunnu temple. Hence our huge store of ballad texts of Malabar area contain fables, stories on social themes, myths, legends, etc. Folk songs collected by Balakrishnan Nair include martial conflicts, sentimental outbursts, heroic deeds etc., which depict the features of ballad literature, fully.

Another variety of ballads, which are composed in the style of prose renderings, have rhyme and rhythm. *Vayanattu Kulayan* of Cannanore and the *Kali Thottams* belong to this group.

1. Epic Ballads

Epic ballads a few in number, are adaptations of stories from the Puranas or Hindu Mythologies. There may be variations in characterisation and the theme undergoing complete, transformation in folk imagination.

Mavaratham Pattu.

Mavaratham is a corruption of Mahabharatham which indicates that it deals with the story of Mahabharatham. *Mavaratham Pattu* is an old ballad in Malayalam, first recorded by C.P. Govindha Pillai. Further studies were made on this *pattu* by Dr. C.A. Menon. He has collected a new version secured from Kottayam and heighbourhood. The early part of the Mahabharata story dealing with the origin of the Lunar line of Kings and the ancestry of the Pandavas, does not find a place in the ballad. Kali who has no place in the epic is invoked which is rather unusual.

2. Historical Ballads

The historical ballads deal with the life and activities of historical heroes with a war background. These ballads present an oral record of historical events and figures. *Vadakken Pattukal* (Ballads of North Malabar) and *Thekken Pattukal* (Ballads of South Kerala) are the major groups of ballads of Kerala. They are classified according to the distinct geographical regions.

Vadakken Pattukal (Ballads of Northern Malabar) is a vast and exhaustive branch of Kerala folk literature which includes many songs extant today. Heroes like *Aromal Chekavar*, *Thacholi Otenan*, *Aromal Unni*, *Thacholi Chandu* and *Palattu Koman* and heroines like *Unniarcha* and *Madhu* are all

historical characters in Malabar area. Another group of songs dealing with Kunjalimarakkur and other chieftans of other Zamorins also belong to this period. Dr. Chelnatu Achutha Menon is of opinion that the incidents narrated in the ballads are confined to the following places namely, Kolathiri Nadu, Kadathanad, Wyanadu and Badakara which were the ancient centres of the ruling chieftanis.

Ballads of North Malabar, singing as they do of the lives and deeds of people in the Northern part of Kerala are known as *Vadakkan Pattukal*, which includes *Puthooram Pattukal*, *Thacholipattukal*, *Ottapattukal*. They are sung every day by women working in paddy fields and men during festivals, pilgrimages and wedding ceremonies.

Vadakken Pattu.

These ballads are sung and learnt orally from generation to generation by illiterate or semi-literate persons. The language is simple and unpretentious but often dignified and some times beautiful. All these ballads are sung in a single metre. Nevertheless, that metre permits variations in tone and rythm to suit every mood, and every emotion.

Ballads of North Malabar were brought out in three volumes under the title *Vadakken Pattukal*. The first part is the study on the various aspects of ballads in general and the second part is a compilation of ballads on *Thacholi Pattukal* comprising more than four thousand lines. Volume one includes the two parts and was published in 1935. The songs deal with the heroic life and activities of Odenyn. Volume two was the joint effort of Dr. Chelnatu Achutha Menon and Dr. S.K. Nair on *Thacholi Pattukal* (1955). Dr. S.K. Nair has edited the third volume. Publishers such as A.R.P. Press, S.T. Reddiyar & Sons, H & C Press and others have published collections on different stories related to North Malabar.

Unniarcha, one among the heroines decks herself in the following fashion while setting out to see the Kuthu at Allimalarkkavu:

*Goes to the sandalwood fraying stone,
Rubs the sandalwood, wets the paste, and streaks the forehead
with the paste
And puts on it the Tlak mask
Seeing herself in the looking glass
And, within it, the saffron mask;
Knots the beautiful flowing hair
And paints her eye with collyrium
And dots her brow with vermillion
And smears her body with sandal to music.*

(Translated by E.M.J. Venniyur.)

The imageries which the composers of the *Vadakken Pattu* chose are such as would occur effortlessly to the artless imagination of rustic bards; and that they are none the less poetic can be vouched for by the following soliloquy of Kandan Menon who loses his head over Matu, the valiant wife of Thachol Chandu:

*Are there such women in this world?
Has she perchance fallen from heaven?
Or perchance from the earth sprung up?
What can I say of her complexion!
Like to the cassia in bloom on the hill,
The sapling of mango shooting its leaves,
Or like the hair of the tender palm leaf,
Or of the Wayanadan turmeric flake?*

(Translated by E.M.J. Venniyur).

There are several songs extolling the heroic deeds of Othenan who belonged to Thacholi in Vadakara. Chathothu Matheyi Amma wanted Othenan to marry her ninth daughter Chiru. But Othenan rejected that proposal and he described the ugly features of Chiru as follows:

*Chiru is black as a crow;
O brother, I don't want this Chiru!
Her teeth like fingers in a jackfruit,
And her head full of rice,
O, brother, I don't want this Chiru
If her father and her mother
Don't want her, let them send her
To that muslim, that Pokkappan of Vadakara,
To swish her hands drying coconuts!
If that muslim too doesn't want her
let them send her packing in a boat
And rid themselves of that rubbish!*

(Translated by Dr. K.M. George)

Finally Othenan and Chiru became partners in their life. In the end Othenan was defeated by Mathiloor Kurukkal.

William Logan,² the author of *Malabar Manual* (Volume I & II) realised the richness of the Northern Ballads and its impact among the people. He has reproduced the detailed text of *Thacholi Pattu* in English with an introductory note. The present author quotes a few lines from his monumental work here:

"Of the hero of the original Tachcholi pat—the Robin Hood of North Malabar—many traditions are extant. He was apparently a man of fine

physique and skilful in the use of arms, who attracted to himself a large and mixed following. It is not exactly said that, like his prototype, he robbed the rich to give to the poor, but he was evidently not too particular as to his means of taking what he wanted for himself or followers. This, no doubt, brought him into collision with the authorities, and the well is still pointed out near Vadakkara in Kurumbranad Taluk which he is said to have cleared at one bound to prevent his capture by the followers of the Kadattanad Raja. The well is a fine masonry-built structure, still in excellent preservation, and at the spot where Tachcholi Othenan is said to have cleared it. It is twenty feet six inches between perpendiculars. There is a massive conical-shaped block of laterite some three feet in height planted erect in the ground about fifteen paces from the well, and one mythical tradition says he jumped the well with this and a jack tree in his arms. In the popular ballad he is stated to have been treacherously shot but whether mortally or not is uncertain, by a Mappilla on returning to search for a dagger he had accidentally dropped in a duel in which he had discomfited his enemy." The following is a literal translation of the ballad, narrating with much quaintness the events of this duel, and shedding various interesting lights on native customs and habits.

*When descending the steps,
The Kurikkal shouted loud and challenged :-
"My good fellow, Tachcholi Kunhi Odena!
"If the tenth and eleventh of Kumbham shall come,
"If God will spare my life,
"I pledge my word to be at Ponniyat.
"There under the Banyan tree
"In single combat could we test our supremacy.
"That day let us meet again!"
Thus the Kurikkal declared the war,
In the midst of the Ten Thousand,
And proceeded back on his way.*

* * *

*Odenan prostrated himself before the Goddess
And prayed :- "O! noble Goddess!
"When I go to Ponniyat
"You must stand on my right.
"I have no other help
"But my mother Goddess!"*

* * *

*In taking leave of his wife, he told her:
"My dear Kunhi Chiru,*

*"Till I come back
 "Don't you stir out of the house,"
 When words like these were heard,
 Beating her breast, she cried.
 "Why do you cry, my dear"? said Odenan,
 "I am not going to die;
 "I shall come very soon".*

* * *

*When coming out thus dressed, he looked
 Like melted gold of ten and a half touch!
 Like the rising sun in the east!
 Like the setting moon in the west!*

* * *

*With the latter's permission,
 Odenan tied his girdle
 One end to a mango tree
 The other to his loins.
 In one pull the tree's leaves came down,
 A second pull brought down the branches.
 Then took he in his right and left
 The sword and shield,
 And ran off, crossing the new river,
 To the Ponniyat Banyan tree,
 Where, in formidable array, people stood;
 But, as ill fate would have it,
 When Ponniyam new river was arrived at
 He found his dagger had been lost.
 At once sayeth he—
 "Hark! my brother!
 "I left my dagger in the arena
 "And I forgot to take it.
 "What shall I do now?"
 "If that is lost," replies the brother,
 "I shall give you another like it".
 It's all true, my brother,
 "But go and take my dagger I must".
 The brother's remonstrance had no effect.
 Odenan ran back to the arena;
 The Kurrikkal seeing this said
 To Chundanga poyilil Mayan Pakki—
 "The Tachcholi who went away, is coming again;
 "Now he will not allow us to survive".*

*Hearing words to this effect,
 Pakki took up his gun, and
 Loaded it with two shots,
 And concealed himself behind a tree
 On Odenan coming near,
 The Mappilla, taking good aim, shot
 At Odenan's forehead.
 He fell down on his knees,
 But would not let his mean enemy escape.
 He threw his sword at him,
 Which cut not only the tree
 But Pakki himself into two.
 Tearing off his silk turban,
 Odenan dressed his wound on the forehead.
 The Kurup, his brother, seeing this
 Burst into tears.
 But, Odenan remained bold and said :-
 "Brother! don't you show your weakness
 "In the midst of these thousands of men.
 "How simple you are!
 "Has anybody as yet died
 "From arrows on the neck?
 "Or from bullets on the forehead?"
 They then began to retreat
 Through the Chambat field
 And reached home—Meppayil in Kadattanad—that day."*

Ballads of North Malabar deal with the various aspects of the land and society of Malabar. The historical data reflected in the ballads are mostly given in an exaggerated manner, even so it can yield information if studied properly. Ballads contain a general picture of the social system in Malabar mainly Nairs and Tiyas. The caste and kinship institutions of the different communities were discussed in these songs. The songs provide descriptions of the system of land tenure of Malabar. The agricultural operations of the people are illustrated. The adventurous life and activities of heroes like Aromal Chevakar, Aromunny, Thacholi Otenan, Thacholi Chandu and heroines like Unniarcha, Madhu etc., are examples of the native martial and national spirit. Apart from the historical and sociological aspects of these ballads, they have opened a new literary trend in literature. The narratives, folk expressions have influenced the development of poetry. These ballads furnish ample evidence about the social and military institutions that dominated the ancient society of Kerala. They further throw light upon the daily habits of the Malayalees and their marriage customs. A close study of them also reveals that the current conceptions of the system of inheritance in *Marumakkathayam* do not have sufficient authority in the local traditions and folklore.

Percey Macqueen collector of Madras and Chinglepet had collected about four hundred songs. Dr. Chelnatt Achyutha Menon and his colleague Dr. S.K. Nair have made use of these materials and published them in three volumes. M.C. Appunni Nambiar and several others brought out different versions of various stories under the same title on *Vadakkan Pattukal*. The collection and the recording of these songs was not done in a scientific way. The editors and compilers added more to the genuine text of the ballads in the later period, in order to keep a high standard of literary excellence.

The collection of Northern Ballads by M.C. Appunni Nambiar is another group of songs which deal with the social life of the people in Kadathanadu in Malabar. Nadapuram Kunhikkannan, Thottathil Kelappan were leading heroes and the songs depict their adventurous lives. Another song describes the story of the construction of a new palace of King Pazhassi at Kuttiyadi. The story tells of Ponnamma, the Pulaya girl who fought against the immoral character of a King, described in a song called *Ponnammayum Kadumkara Naduvazhiyum*. Ten songs of this collection are mainly of the lower class community.

It is difficult to fix the date of the *Vadakkan Pattukal* because external form must have undergone many changes, in its transmission through centuries. From the linguistic point of view, the syntactical and morphological aspects, the ballads are not so old, some of them are comparatively modern.

Borrowings from foreign languages are seen in the text which shows that the period is only after the advent of the Portuguese. These cannot be composed prior to 14th century. So that those songs may be composed probably in the 16th or in the 17th century at the earliest. It is difficult to agree with the opinion of Dr. C.A. Menon.

Logan³ says that the common people still compose ballads in memory of passing events, and one of the most remarkable relates the circumstances attending one of the Mappila outrages and recalls with graphic power and a great deal of exaggeration of course, the chief incidents that occurred. He then gives a short description of the theme narrated in the Mappila song.

2. Thekken Pattu.

Besides *Vadakkan Pattukal* there is a vast area of ballads in Malayalam such as *Thekken Pattukal*, *Chengannokunhathi*, *Chamundikatha*, *Mathilakathu Katha*, *Chinnajal Katha*, *Niili Katha*, *Amman Katha*, *Mariyamman Katha*, *Idastham Katha*, *Keralavarman Thampuram Pattu*, *Rameswaram Yathra*, *Anchu Thampuram Pattu*, *Eravikkutti Pilla Poru*, *Vettumaaruthan Poru*, *Kesava Pilla Divan Poru*, *Ponnirathal Katha*.

Kanjirakulam Kochukrishna Nadar has compiled the major ballads of Southern Kerala such as *Chamundi Katha*, *Mathilakathu Katha*, *Iravikkutti Pillai Poru*, *Keralavarma Thampuram Pattu*, *Neelikatha*, *Daksha Charitham*, *Sastham Katha*, *Muvvottumallan Katha*. These ballads were sung in the form of *Villupattu*. The themes of these ballads are mainly historical, social or epic.

Konniyur T. Kassim has collected *Thekken Pattukal* (Quilon : 1967) contain five ballads. *Chengannoor Kunhu* was a hero of the Paraya community. The compiler quotes three stories in three ballads under the same title. *Panduvanadi*, is another ballad. It deals with the story of a pastoral hero who hails from Tamilnadu. He came to Kerala in order to feed his herd of cattle. The landlord took away his beloved wife. He fought with the landlord and succeeded in defeating him. Another one is the love story of Maran and Pangiyal.

Chengannokunhathi.

Chengannokunhathi (Trivandrum : 1964) is a folk ballad recorded by Vettiyar Premnath. The theme of the ballad is the story of Chengannokunhathi, a hero among the Paraya community of central Travancore. He was trained in the traditional *Kalari*. After his primary education in *Kalari* training he went on a tour outside his village with the permission of his mother. Kunhathi was mistaken for the military chieftain of the Raja of Thekkamkur by Paluvam Koy. He fought against Kunhathi. Paluvam Koy was defeated by Kunhathi. Then Kunhathi went to the traditional house of Paluvam Koy and made a request to marry Paluvam Pennu, the daughter of Paluvanappen. Paluvanappen conducted several tests in order to select a brave man as the bridegroom of his daughter. Kunhathi won in all the tests and married Paluvam Pennu. On the seventh day of their marriage, Kunhathi and Paluvam Pennu went on a holiday trip.

The thieves of the streets and *chettis* attacked Kunhathi but Kunhathi overpowered the entire group. He was again invited to Kunnuvampkalari for a fight. He fought alone against a group of thieves and killed them. After the fight he found to his great dismay that his wife was missing. He left immediately in search of his wife.

Paluvam Pennu had gone to Karadiyam Kotta, a safe shelter and waited until her husband arrived. Kunhathi went there accidentally, met his wife Kunhathi and led a happy life for a short period. Paluvam Pennu went to Kunnuvamp Mani, another Paraya girl, and invited her to be the wife of her husband. Paluvam Pennu knew the love story of her husband with Kunnuvamp Mani earlier. Kunhathi again went to Uluvanthu Kotta. He fought with several people. Finally in a duel with Eriya Panikken, Kunhathi and his wife were killed.

Kunhathi belonged to Chengannoor and he was associated with nineteen famous *Kalaries* in Travancore area. There is a reference to Thekkumkur Raja. How far this story is faithful to the history of Kerala is disputed. It is a ballad exclusive to the Paraya community. The militant and brave character of Kunhathi has always been projected in these songs.

Historical ballads such as *Eravikkutty Pillai Pattu*, *Anchu Thampuran Pattu*, *Ulakute Perumal Pattu*, *Valiya Thambi Katha*, *Dharma Rajavinte Rameswaram Yatra*, *Kannadiayan Poru*, *Padappattu*, *Margam Kali Pattu* etc., form part of the Malayalam ballad literature.

Eravikkutti Pilla Poru

Eravikkutti Pilla Poru (Kanhirakkulam: 1962) brought out by Kanhirakkulam K. Kochukrishna Nadar is a historical ballad. P. Govindha Pillai is of the opinion that this ballad was composed in the early part of the 14th century A.D. R. Narayana Panikker says that this was written in the 16th century A.D. and quotes references in the ballad. Ullur S. Parameswar Iyer endorses the view of R. Narayana Panikker. Suranattu Kunhan Pillai has pointed out the historic importance of this ballad in his introductory note to this book. *Eravikkutti Pillai Poru* is a fine example of a Malayalam historic ballad. This ballad is popularly used for the singing of *Vilpattu* in Travancore area.

The heroic deeds of Eravikkutti Pillai, the brave son of Venadu is narrated in detail. Eravikkutti Pillai was killed in the battle with the army of Thirumala Naicken of Madurai. This historical ballad narrated the historical events during the reign of Thirumala Naicken.

Anchu Thampuran Pattu

This song deals with intrigues among the members of the Royal family of Travancore during the 16th century A.D. Two boys were adopted as princes and taken from Odanattu to Venattu. The quarrel between King Adithya Varma (1535 A.D.) and these boys is depicted in this ballad. Historical events of the period have also been described in *Anchu Thampuran Pattu*.

Thampuran Pattu

The members of the Ettuveetu were afraid of the outslights of King Marthanda Varma in Travancore. They lived scattered in different places in order to escape from Marthanda Varma. This song is composed in the form of travel songs of the Ettuveetu people.

Ulakude Perumal Pattu

The hero in this song is a relative of the Pandya King. This ballad narrates the story of Ulakude Perumal from his early years to his suicide by

self immolation. Ulakude Perumal is supposed to be an incarnation of God and people in the Southern parts of Travancore worship him. His heroic activities are sung during the *Padayani* festival.

Valiya Thambi, the ballad narrates the historical fight between the royal houses of Marthanda Varma and of Thampi. This narrative song deals with the story of the internal conflict in the Kingdom of Travancore.

Dharma Rajavinte Rameswaram Yatra, this ballad narrates the journey of Dharma Raja to Rameswaram in 1784.

3. Religious Ballads

Religious ballads known as *Thottam Pattu* in Malayalam, deal with the legendary story of Kali. They are mainly of two types such as *stuti* or hymn, and recitations with enacting of some episodes from the Kali tradition. The commonest theme for the second type is the story of *Darika Vadham* (killing of the Darikan). *Thottam Pattu* is the largest collection of religious songs which deal with themes of the different conceptions of the mother, the merging of Kannaki with Kali.

Songs on Pilgrims also belong to the genre of ballad to some extent.

Margam Kali Pattu which is a ballad of the Christian community in Kerala deals with the life and activities of St. Thomas, the Apostle, who came to India to teach the doctrines of Christ.

The central protagonist of *Maargam Kali* is St. Thomas. His arrival in Kerala, his missionary work, the miracles he performed, the friendship as well as the hostility of the people among whom he worked, the persecution he suffered, the chapels and crosses he put up, at several places—these details have been incorporated in different stanzas of the *Maargam Kali* song, which is a religious ballad of the Christians in Kerala.

The theme is the dream of a beautiful mansion by Chozhan, probably a Chola King of Mylapore country, the sending of his Minister, Avan, to bring in a master architect; the bringing in of St. Thomas, the delight of the King on seeing a fine drawing by the Apostle, the collecting of innumerable materials; St. Thomas going away on Gospel work to Kerala and thence to Malacca and China; imprisoning of the Holy Man on his return by the irate King; the ailment and apparent death of the heir-apparent, his soul being taken by angels to heaven where it beheld the fair mansion prepare for Chozhan and its return to life telling the King of the good tidings; the conversion of the Royal family and a multitude of followers; the lancing of the Saint by the Embrans who are the priests of the temple and the taking of the body to Chinna Malai, now called the Little Mount.

This ancient song is made up of fourteen *padas* or stanzas.

Historical records go to establish the fact these ancient religious songs were widely sung when the Portuguese arrived in Kerala in 16th century. From the linguistic aspects of these songs it is to be presumed they were drafted somewhere in 17th century and are not so ancient as claimed by some protagonists. They cannot be categorised as folk songs in general but only as a Christian ballad in its early crude form. It is merely a bland description of the role of St. Thomas, devoid of poetic flavour. However, giving room for speculation in respect of its antiquity, a few Tamil language expressions are also seen.⁴

Scholars differ in their opinions regarding the authorship of this work. According to P.J. Thomas the exact authorship of these songs has not been traced and that the attribution of it to Itti Thomman Kathanar, a priest of Kallussery diocese in Kottayam, is speculative and controversial. According to T.M. Chummar the *Maargamkali* songs underwent a number of linguistic metamorphosis in tune with the new trends that developed through the centres. However the remark made by him does not seem to be sound. Since inherent poetic characteristics of folk songs are absent, it is to be conjectured that it is the work of an individual. Thomas Makkil is of the opinion that Anjilimuttal Itti Thomman Kathanar, a Kananaya priest of the 17th century has refashioned *Maargakali* to the present form. All available evidence warrants the attributing of the authorship of the work to Itti Thommen Kathanar who was a revolutionary Kananaya clergyman. Itti Thommen Kathanar who was militantly hostile to the Portuguese and their overbearing nature, perhaps in revengeful spirit wanted to organise a coterie of young revolutionaries. He saw in this art form with its martial aspects, a splendid forum for infusing in his disciples a martial fervour.

4. Social Ballads

Mathileri Kanni

The *Vadakken Pattu*, the spirit of which reverberates in the atmosphere of Malabar has a wonderful gallery of heroines and *Mathileri Kanni* is one of the best among them. *Mathileri Kanni* (Trichur : 1979), an excellent example of a social ballad is collected by T.H. Kunhiraman Nambiar.

Mathileri Kanni is a collection of the lives of three women namely Mathileri Kanni, Venadu Poongovil Kanni, Chooriyamani Kanni. These three ballads present different aspects of love. The synopsis of the ballad is as follows:

Kolatheri Raja was the ruler of land south of Ezhimala. The chief of Chirakara known as Chirakara Vazhunnavu was a feudal chief under Kola-

theri and very closely related to him. He was comander in Chief of Kolatheri and he married the sister of Elayadath Raja. Mathileri Kanni was his only daughter who lost her mother early.

She was brought up by her father in a disciplined and orderly way, being well trained for the arts of war and duties of administration. She attained womanhood and helped her father in the administration of his estate. One day she went to the temple of Valarkavu to witness a religious festival. There she met Raja of Venad and it was a case of love at first sight. Their marriage was celebrated.

Even before the honey moon was over, the prince of Venad had to go back because the Chief of Venad had attacked Venad with Pandya support. The chief of Venad informed his father-in-law of the war but requested him to keep the news from his wife.

Three years elapsed. Kanni one day appeared before her father wept and told him that a husband who did not care for her for 3 years was no husband at all. Then Vazhumarar told his daughter that her husband was in the battle field. Like a premotion a messenger came from Venad with a request for a general. Kanni was determined to go and help her husband. Dressed like a fullfledged knight, cutting across river and fields, she came before her husband and concealing her identity with the assumed name of Ponnann, took up command.

Ponnann defeated the forces of Oadanad and continued as the Minister of the King of Venad. His wisdom was admired by all and the sister of King of Venad fell in love with him. She tried all she could do to win his favour but the reception was cold. In the meanwhile Ponnann left for Chirakara-nadu. So the King of Venad left for Chirakara to meet his wife with Ponnann.

On the the way he had to rest at Churiamani palace at Kadathanad. Churiya Mani Kanni the daughter of that feudal Chief fell in love with him. He decided to win him over by hook or by crook. The prince of Venad reached Mathileri Kovilakam. As he was enjoying life with his long lost wife, treacherous Churiya Mani Kanni came there, styling herself as a friend of Matheleri Kanni. She gained influence in the household and on a festive day gave poisoned sweets to Mathileri Kanni. As she lay in the lap of her husband awaiting death, she divulged the secret that it was she who saved Venad. Then breathed her last. Her father was unable to bear the loss. Her husband also died of heart break on his way back to Venad. Thus disappeared the two immortal lovers and a father who had blessed them.

V.T. Kumaran has made an introductory study on this ballad. The literary, social, historical and linguistic aspects of the texts are discussed. According to him the date of its composition is about the 14th century. The

lyrical charm, literary style, stream of the oral narration, simplicity, economy of expression are the virtues of this ballad. *Mathileri Kanni* shows the features of traditional ballad literature and throws light on the literary ballads in Kerala.

Usually each village had one or two men or women who were famous as singers and sometimes composed ballads. T.H. Kunhiraman, the famous compiler and singer of ballads in North Malabar has brought out *Mathileri Kanni*, a collection of three balladeers who propagated those ballads either in the way of Kathaprasangam (story narration) or group singing. The talented ballad singers compose new ballads which are acceptable to the villagers in the traditional form. The services rendered by the singers are also taken into the consideration of balladry. The successful ballad composer, who understands the mind of the people tells his story so as to appeal to their tastes, their ethical code, political consciousness and their hearts.

Ponnirathal

Ponnirathal Katha (Trivandrum : 1954) was a famous social ballad sung in the Travancore area. This ballad was published by Suranattu Kunjan Pillai under the auspices of Manuscripts Library, Trivandrum. The same version of the story entitled *Ponnirathal Katha* (Kottayam : 1968) was published with a commentary by Aranmula Sathya Vrathan.

Ponnirathal is the story of a beautiful girl of Vaduvar community in Kadayam village at Thirunneveli district. Pavoora Ena Suuran, a landlord fell in love with her and they married. They were very happy but had no children. They conducted prayers and offering to several gods. Ponnirathal went to the temple tank for a bath. She took shelter under a banyan tree nearby. The temple priest came that way. He decided to go along with Ponnirathal to her home. At that time a group of robbers were sitting inside the temple to steal the *nidhi* (treasure). They had to sacrifice a pregnant lady in the temple in order to get the treasure of wealth. The temple priest showed Ponnirathal to them. They cheated her and took her forcibly to the temple. The thieves took all the wealth and decided to divide it. They wanted a *Mulanazhi* (a kind of vessel for measuring). They went to measure out and divide the loot among them; they first to cut a bamboo for the purpose. At once, wild animals came and ate up the thieves and the priest.

The parents of Ponnirathal who went searching for Ponnirathal found her dead body. There was a big uproar about this strange tragic dead body. Finally the Pandya King intervened in the issue and the story comes to an end. The total tone of the story is that of a romance.

Ballads of Lakshadweep

The language of one group of people in the islands of Lakshadweep

in the Arabian sea is an admixture of Arabi Malayalam. These islands lie at some distance from Kerala. The ancestors of the people in the islands were the inhabitants of Kerala. These are mainly occupied by the Muslim community. They had their own folk songs and art forms associated with cultural background of Muslims.

P. Sathikumaran Nair has collected three ballads from these islands. *Lakshadweepile Kathaganangal* (Kottayam : 1975) is the first attempt to study the ballads in the islands. The complete texts of the ballads such as *Muthamsirakku*, *Obhana Puvu*, *Saanam Kathiya* have been annotated with detailed linguistic notes.

Mutham Sirakka.

Mutham Sirakka and her wife Puvu were leading a happy family life. One day Mutham Sirakka saw his Manager in his wife's bedchamber. The Manager or Kariyakkar was an authorised representative of Arakkal Kingdom. Mutham Sirakka became angry with his wife, Puvu and cut off her hair completely. Puvu wanted a divorce from her husband. Mutham Sirakka agreed to the divorce and wanted her to return all her ornaments. After the divorce Kariyakkar married Puvu. On the first night, the Kariyakkar took with him poison mixed ghee and made her smell it. Suddenly Puvu died. Kariyakkar left the place very next day. The old mother of Puvu saw the dead body of her beloved daughter. This tragic story has got a morally oriented social theme.

Obhana Puvu

King Ali searched for a new wife, after the death of his first wife. The King knew that there was a beautiful girl who was married to a man named Kuttitharuva. The King wanted to see the charming girl and decided to marry her. Kuttitharuva and Puvu who knew of the King's intention escaped from the King by hiding. But the King finally took Puvu to prison with the aid of a strong military force and removed her to his palace at Cannanore. Puvu cherished the memory of her husband. One day she told the King that she wanted to visit her motherland, Amini. She went to her old husband's residence. The King was much pleased to see her love towards her husband. As a mark of appreciation of her love and loyalty to her husband, the king bequeathed to her vast lands free of tax.

Saanam Kathiya

Kuttiyammadu, the ruler of the country and leader of the robbers in the island saw a beautiful girl called Saanam Kathiya. He kidnapped her and took her to his palace at Cannanore. After a short period of her stay,

Saanam decided to escape from the palace. She left the palace during the night and reached her island country.

Ballads on Obhana Puvu and *Saanam Kathiya* deals with the stories of Ali, the ruler of Cannanore. *Mutham Sirakku* is purely a love story, which illustrated the social life of the islands. The former ballads narrate the activities of the rulers, while the third one conveys a moral to the women folk. These three ballads are supposed to be the composition of one author. The diction and style carry common features. These ballads clearly show the characteristics of the life in Lakshadweep.

Ballad literature has a popular mass appeal in the modern period. Many of them broadly deal with the problems of young lovers who had to contend with the opposition of their families. Sometimes, a rich man's daughter may fall in love with a poor class man. Local railroad and motor accidents are some of the tragic incidents also narrated in those ballads. Ballads on Mappila Rebellion, were popularised among the Malabar folk. Ballads were composed on Political struggles of Punnappa Vayalar and Kayyur.

Thousands of copies of those ballads were sold in the villages of Kerala. No doubt such socio-political stories reflect the historical and cultural background of the land and the people. Those journalistic narratives once sold in the street and tavern and from the peddler's pack also play a major role in ballad literature. In fact, native balladry is based largely upon actual events, and whatever it lacks in smoothness is made up for by the sense of reality it conveys.

Villu Pattu

Villu Pattu or *Vilpattu* is a popular folk art form in Kerala. Literally it is translated as "bow songs". The text of the song are simple and flowing invariably in ballad style. The stories are woven round supernatural, mythological, devotional, historical, and social themes. Ballads were popularised through the performances of *Villu Pattu* in Kerala and Tamilnadu. In the 15th century, one Arasa Pulavar is said to have originated the *Villu Pattu* in Tamil Nadu says S.M.L. Lakshmanan Chettiar.⁵ The Southern part of the Kerala there are a number of *Villu Pattu* troupes are engaged in this entertainment.

The main story teller of the party will be seated in the centre with a bow with two slender wooden rods, one in each hand. Some other percussion instrument are also used in the performance. The arrangement of the performances of the programme are usually made in the open ground or in the courtyard of temples. The main story teller completes the line of the songs, the persons accompanying on the musical instruments will repeat the last phrase

of the line or they will respond in chorus. Dialogue is employed during the singing. The main story teller has to reply to the questions asked by the members of the party. Different narrative styles and musical patterns are used in the performances in order to attract the audience. In some places, artists use some costumes representing the characters of the ballads. As soon as the chief vocalist in the party has finished singing a couplet or a stanza, the other members of the party take up the refrain and sing it in chorus. The repetition of the refrain enables the listeners to follow the bow-song story. Now stories and ballads are published for the purpose of *Vilpattu* performances.

These ballads are numerous which deal with the problems of young lovers who had to contend with the opposition of their families, social injustice, etc. Most of them are journalistic narratives sold in the streets. Broadside ballad singers compose ballads on current political problems in the country. Other subjects include war and its results, murder and other crimes, disasters on land and sea, sentimental incidents and farcical ones. Ballads on political leaders such as A.K. Gopalan, Azhikkoden Raghavan etc., were recently composed and sung by the working class people. Famous agitations of Punnappra and Vayalar in Alleppey district, Kayyur in Malabar area and Mappila rebellion were the themes of ballads. The simple ballad stories offer memorable scenes from the ever changing drama of human life. But it has little power to survive in an uncorrupted form in the alien world of media entertainment.

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